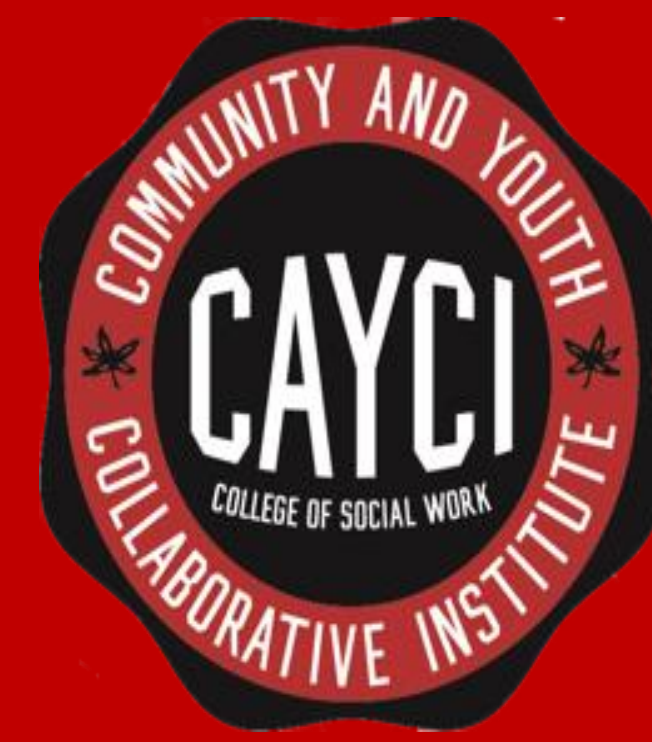


# Lessons Learned from the LiFEsports Initiative: Facilitators and Barriers to Successful Community Partnerships

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## Overview of Initiative

In 1968 the National Youth Sport Program (NYSP) began at The Ohio State University (OSU). However, when federal funding was cut in 2006, Ohio State Athletics and OSU’s College of Social Work partnered to develop the Learning in Fitness and Education through Sports (LiFEsports) Initiative. LiFEsports aims to “enhance the quality of youth development, sport, and recreational programs through service and outreach, teaching and learning, and research, thereby increasing positive developmental outcomes for youth.” Specifically, LiFEsports addresses the needs of youth in Central Ohio by providing evidence-based programming that aims to promote positive health and wellness outcomes.

Each year, LiFEsports serves over 900 youth through programs such as the LiFEsports Summer Camp, LiFEsports Clinics, and the Youth Leadership Academy. Through licensing partnerships with local afterschool programs and schools, an additional 1,100 youth participate in LiFEsports programming at local non-profit organizations. One of the keystone programs is the LiFEsports Summer Camp which aims to foster social competence among youth of color and/or living in poverty. During the 2016 LiFEsports Summer Camp, 605 youth engaged in this 4-week program. The majority of youth identified as Black or African American (90.5%) and male (59.0%), were on average 11.6 years old, and 80.3% of youth living within 200% of the poverty line.

## Partnerships

University and community partnerships are an intricate and valuable component of the LiFEsports Initiative. Each year, LiFEsports develops and sustains at least 20 university and community partnerships. These valuable partnerships help to provide resources such as funding, staff support, facilities, sport equipment, and food. Additionally, LiFEsports has developed partnerships with afterschool programs and schools to help provide evidence-based programming throughout the community. Throughout the year, LiFEsports also provides opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to engage with the local community by serving youth and their families. For instance, through university and community partnerships, LiFEsports offers a variety of employment opportunities, internships, field practice, research, coursework, and independent study opportunities. Ultimately, the LiFEsports Initiative would not be possible without the support, resources and opportunities provided by its multiple partners.



### University Partners

College of Arts and Sciences	College of Social Work	Office of Student Life
College of Dentistry	Department of Athletics	OSU Extension and 4-H
College of Education and Human Ecology	Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation	OSU Student Athlete Support Services Office
College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences	Department of Recreational Sports	Sports and Society Initiative
College of Nursing	Facilities Operations and Development	Undergraduate Admission and First Year Experience
College of Optometry		
College of Public Health	Office of Outreach & Engagement	

### Community Partners

After-School All-Stars Ohio	Greater Columbus Arts Council	Nationwide Children’s Hospital
ALL THAT	Huntington National Bank	Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association
Boys and Girls Club of Columbus	I Know I Can	Ohio Department of Education
Camp Mary Orton	Illinois State University	Pickerington Local Schools
Cardinal Health	Local Matters	Pitney Bowes Presort Services
Columbus City Schools	Michigan State University	YMCA of Central Ohio
Columbus Crew	Mid-Ohio Food Bank	Youth to Youth International



## Facilitators

Within the LiFEsports Initiative, there are several unique university and community partnerships. The major facilitators of these successful and often long-term partnerships include staying focused on the LiFEsports mission, fostering mutual benefits, understanding expectations and self-interests of each partner, ensuring the partnership agenda fits a need among the youth and overall program, and maximizing the resources within the partnership. Partners build upon existing relationships and/or create new ones to advance the LiFEsports network, as well as their own, and create additional resources to ensure impact and future sustainability. Additional facilitators include transportation and linkages to facilities in the community where LiFEsports can be expanded. Ultimately, the relationships, continued involvement, and long-term support lead to successful partnerships. Additional facilitators include:

- Alignment of missions
- Mutual benefits for each partner (i.e., each partner, LiFEsports and ultimately youth all benefit)
- Opportunities for program expansion
- Receiving additional planning, development and sustainability support
- Increasing exposure of partners to target audiences
- Serving the needs community needs
- Serving to enhance the experience for youth

## Barriers

Although university and community partnerships help serve and address community needs, there are challenges to engaging in partnerships. Such challenges include differing expectations, timing of resource acquisition, competing for resources and services, and reaching a limited number of the total population served. For example, lacking the infrastructure to create partnerships and leverage others is one of the largest barriers. Resources may not reach all youth due to staffing, funding, or facility limitations. The priority of members in the partnership to further the outcomes of youth may depend on staff and funding allocated to the partnership. In addition, single time interactions, the lack of parent involvement, and challenges with volunteer engagement may be limiting. Developing working partnerships takes time and thrives when mutual goals are identified. Misidentification of partner and initiative needs also can lead to a loss of resources, student involvement and future success in the partnership. Several key barriers include:

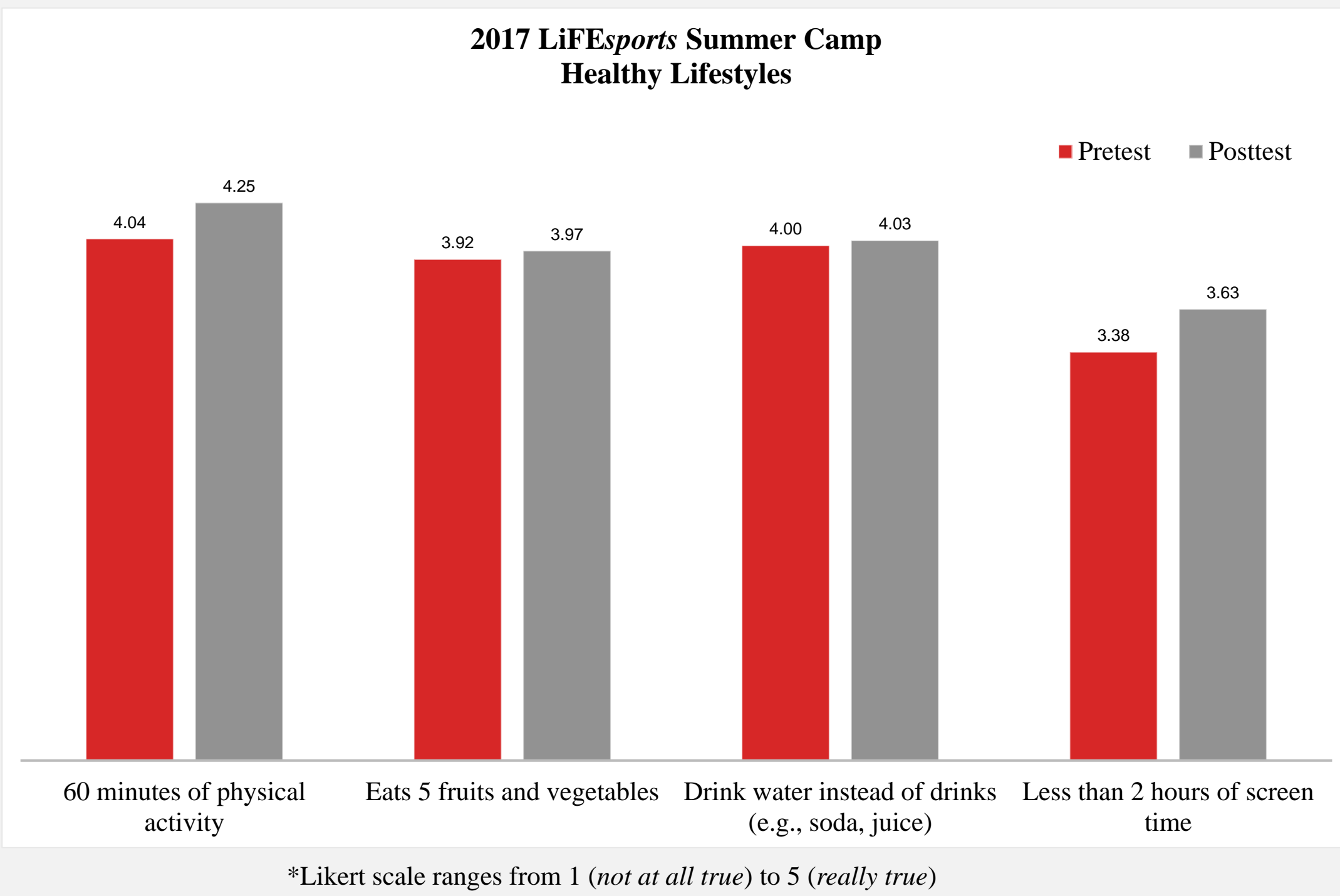
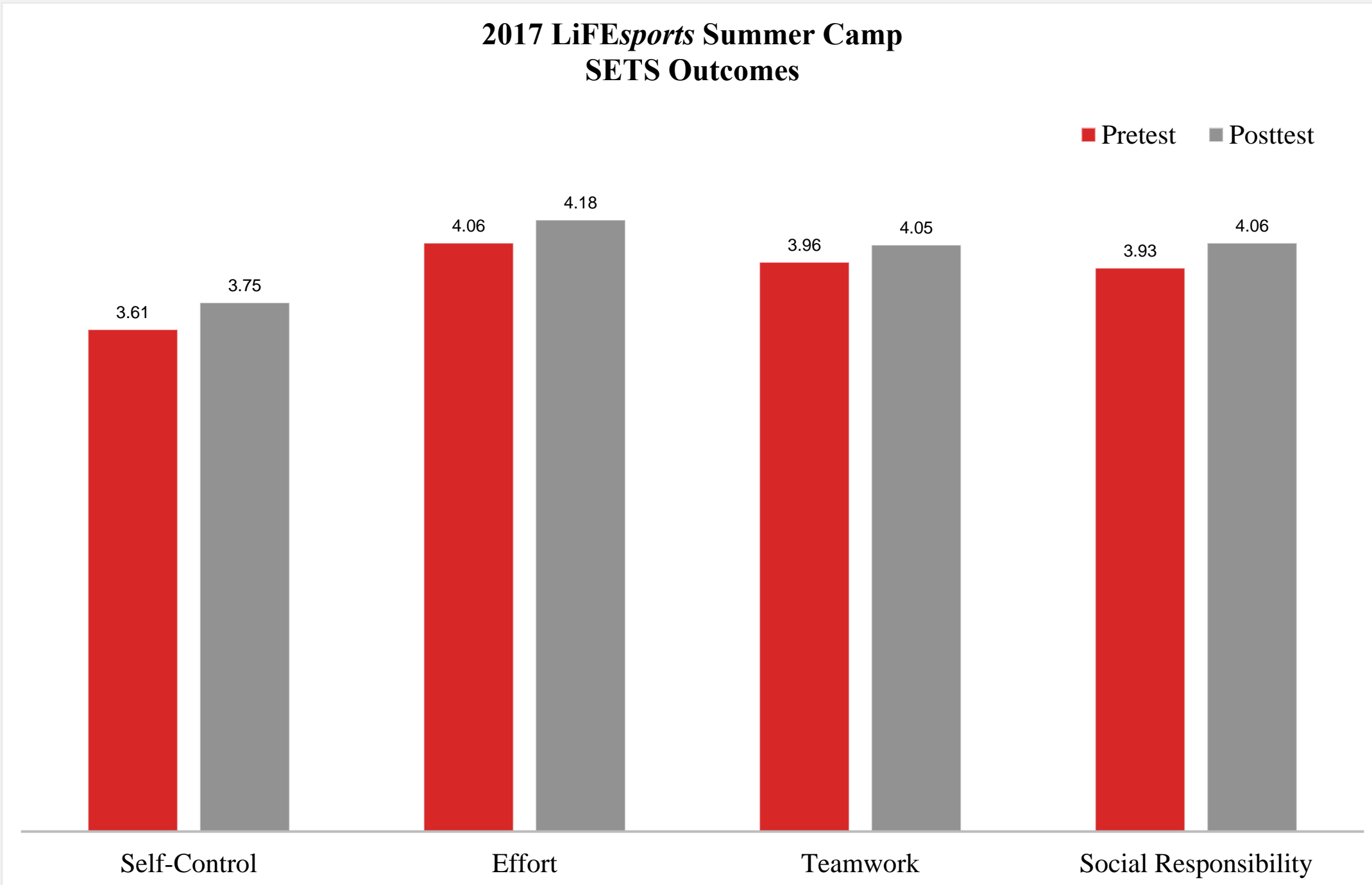
- Differences of expectations, missions, and objectives
- Limited engagement (e.g., helping with a single event rather than sustained partnership)
- Communication barriers
- Compliance with rules and policies
- Limited resources (e.g., space, equipment, staff support)
- Competition among LiFEsports, partners, and similar organizations for a common resources

## Health & Wellness Outcomes

Community and University partner contributions of funding, staffing, and planning have led to positive outcomes for youth. In addition, partners are involved in the LiFEsports Advisory Council guiding policy, sustainability, and alignment to the organization mission. Partner contributions include, but are not limited to:

- Funding and staffing resources
- Facilities provided by the Department of Athletics, College of Social Work, and Department of Recreational Sports.
- Involvement of graphic designer, community engagement chair, and athletic trainers
- 400 OSU student- employees, interns, and volunteers
- Community volunteers to support programming.
- 10,683 meals during summer camp
- 104 dental screenings provided by College of Dentistry and volunteers

In the end, LiFEsports has been able to positively impact the health and wellness for Central Ohio youth due to these and other valuable partnerships. Specifically, LiFEsports youth have demonstrated significant growth in life skills such as self-control, effort, teamwork, and social responsibility, and in health and wellness outcomes such as physical activity, self-efficacy, and cardiovascular fitness.



## Conclusions and Next Steps

LiFEsports has provided opportunities for youth in Central Ohio to engage in evidence-based programs that aim to promote health and wellness outcomes. The sustainability and progress of LiFEsports is dependent upon several key university and community partners. As such, the ability to minimize barriers and promote facilitators are key to developing successful partnerships. Each year adjustments are made to new and continuing partnerships, each unique but also key to a successful youth development initiative.

If you are interested in learning more about LiFEsports or becoming a partner, please visit our website at [www.osulifesports.org](http://www.osulifesports.org). Additional opportunities to get involved in LiFEsports include:

- Volunteering at LiFEsports programming (e.g., Summer Camp, Clinics).
- Enrolling the coursework (e.g., SWK2110, SWK 7704, Youth Development Minor).
- Integrating resources as a university or community partner to LiFEsports.
- Contacting us for information on collaboration on 2018 LiFEsports Collaborative.
- Establishing awareness of positive youth development strategies in your initiative.